

Thai EFL University Students' Engagement with CEFR: Perceived Proficiency, Awareness and Skill Development Requirement

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Abstract

In Thailand, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) serves as a standard for assessing English proficiency in educational institutions and is incorporated into curricula to guide and assess students' learning outcomes. This study aimed to understand how Thai university students engage with the CEFR in their English language learning. Specifically, it investigated (1) students' perceived English proficiency based on the CEFR, (2) their awareness of implementing the CEFR, (3) their perceptions of the CEFR, and (4) their needs for improving their English skills to meet the CEFR standards. A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather data from 177 students through convenience sampling, along with interviews conducted with 12 selected participants representing each CEFR level from A1 to C2. The questionnaire results indicated that students rated their English proficiency at the A1 level and had moderate awareness of the CEFR. Although students faced challenges such as limited understanding and a lack of materials, interview findings revealed that students had a positive view of the CEFR for promoting autonomy and self-assessment. For their needs, lower-level students expressed a desire to improve their listening and speaking skills, while higher-level students needed to enhance their reading and writing abilities. Moreover, students requested additional support from the university and clearer guidance from teachers on how to use the CEFR effectively. This study proposes directions for future research and offers practical recommendations to enhance students' successful engagement with the CEFR.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), English language teaching (ELT), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), English proficiency, perceptions

Introduction

English is an international language and is used for communication around the world. It plays an important role in many fields such as science, medicine, engineering, business, and education. In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). English language teaching is fundamental for Thailand's basic education system as it is one of the mandatory subjects from elementary school to university levels (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008). The development of English language proficiency among Thai students has been a continuous process. The Thai Ministry of Education has allocated large budgets and has reformed language policies to improve English language education (Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick, 2016). In higher education, the Thai Ministry of Education has made efforts to internationalize and support both public and private universities to offer international programs with English as a medium of instruction (Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Despite these efforts, Thai students' English proficiency levels have deviated from the predetermined goals and have been declining steadily over time.

According to the Office of the Basic Education Commission (2008), Thai students are required to have a sufficient understanding of the English language. However, Thailand's English proficiency index was at the very low-level band, ranked at 21/24 in Asia and 97/111 countries in the world (Education First, 2022). It is reported that Thailand has been in this band since 2011, indicating concerns for English language teaching and learning. Also, Thai students lack English communicative skills (Kwangsawad, 2017). As a result, they face great challenges to achieve the goals set by the Thai Ministry of Education.

One of the influences on the development of English language education in Thailand is the ASEAN community. The ASEAN Charter, Article 34 states, "The working language of ASEAN shall be English" (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008: 29). As a result, English is important because it serves as the lingua franca for communication among ASEAN countries. Therefore, English proficiency is necessary

for Thai citizens, and Thailand as one of the ASEAN members needs to develop students' English language proficiency as a crucial part of fostering the population's potential of the country.

Regarding the educational policy in English language development, the ASEAN countries, particularly Vietnam, China, and Thailand, have determined the level of students' English competency in all four English skills based on the Common European of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scales (Chaiyamat and Chalauisaeng, 2024). In Thailand, the CEFR has played an important role in the current English language policy. The Thai Ministry of Education has adopted this framework for reforming English teaching at all levels of education (Ministry of Education, 2014). The CEFR not only provides a structured framework for evaluating the proficiency of both teachers and students but also guides the teaching and learning of English in Thailand. In order to evaluate the English language proficiency of Thai students and teachers, the CEFR serves as a standard against which language skills are measured (Phong-a-ran, Luksup, and Chaisoda 2019). Regarding its role in guiding the teaching and learning of English in Thailand, the CEFR helps set clear language proficiency goals for learning. With CEFR-based exams now considered high-stakes assessments in Thailand (Namfah, 2022), schools and universities have made their English curricula and standardized tests with the CEFR levels to evaluate students' progress. This allows teachers to measure whether students meet specific language benchmarks, facilitating systemic tracking and improvement of their students' English skills. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education set goals for university graduates to achieve B1 and B2 levels in the CEFR, which signify independent users of English (Anantapol, Keeratikorntanayod, and Chobphon, 2018). However, the majority of Thai university students remain as basic users of English (A1 or A2 levels) (Luksup and Chaisoda, 2019; Phong-a-ran, Luksup, and Chaisoda, 2019; Waluyo, 2019).

Previous studies of the CEFR focused on several aspects such as language assessment (Apelgren and Baldwin, 2018; Lee, 2020; Phong-a-ran, Luksup, and Chaisoda, 2019; Waluyo, 2019), teaching

methods (Ohashi and Katagiri, 2020; Topal, 2019; Yusoff et al., 2022), or language policies (Savski, 2022). However, Phoolaikao and Sukying (2021) stated that only a few studies have examined stakeholders' perceptions of the CEFR, particularly in the Thai context. From a review of the literature, it was also found that there was a scarcity of studies on students' perceptions of the CEFR since the majority of previous studies focused on the teachers.

Understanding students' perceptions is essential for success in EFL learning (Ghazali, 2016; Lai and Aksornjarung, 2018; William et al., 2004). Dörnyei (2001) emphasized that learners construct knowledge based on their experiences, indicating that their perspectives play a significant role in shaping motivation and engagement. Given the low English proficiency levels among Thai EFL students, it is essential to explore their views on the CEFR to enhance language education. This study aimed to investigate how Thai EFL university students perceive the CEFR. Students' engagement with the CEFR is evident in their views regarding its relevance and effectiveness. Positive perceptions of the CEFR can enhance motivation, commitment, and progress in learning, fostering a sense of confidence and ownership over their educational journey.

Furthermore, students' perceptions of CEFR can reflect their awareness of its role in proficiency evaluations. When students view the CEFR as a credible assessment framework, they are more likely to engage seriously with evaluations, which can lead to improved performance. This study specifically investigated students perceived proficiency based on the CEFR levels, their awareness of its implementation in learning, their perceptions of it for proficiency evaluation, and their needs for improving English skills to meet the CEFR standards. By examining these areas, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that can enhance English language teaching and learning in Thailand, particularly leading to improved students proficiency.

Literature Review

This section provides a theoretical framework and related studies on the CEFR and perceptions focusing on English language learning and teaching as follows.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The Council of Europe established the CEFR in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR is an international standard for measuring language proficiency which can be applied to any European languages including English (Council of Europe, 2018). The CEFR was developed with the background of European multilingualism and multiculturalism, making it applicable and widely used with more than 40 languages across the world (Council of Europe, 2020). This framework has become one of the dominant references for language teaching and assessment, particularly in English (Savski, 2022).

The CEFR describes language proficiency on a six-point scale, ranging from A1-A2 levels (Basic User), B1-B2 levels (Independent User), and C1-C2 levels (Proficient User). Each level consists of specific descriptions about the language proficiency needed for effective communication related to situations and contexts in which communication takes place (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR has different goals and functions focusing on all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Descriptions with can-do statements are used on the CEFR scales to describe levels of language proficiency that a language learner can perform. Each CEFR level has its specific descriptions in relation to language knowledge, skills, and competences that a language learner can perform. It can be seen that second language (L2) learners at the A1 level can interact with a very limited basic language, while the C2 level indicates the highest level of language proficiency pursued by L2 learners; however, this level may not be perfect at the level of a native speaker (Negishi, 2012; North, 2014).

The CEFR is a comprehensive guideline for the curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment for language education (Council of Europe, 2001). In consideration of the specificity and universality, the use of the CEFR, therefore, helps interpret the results obtained in different learning contexts. The CEFR improves standardization of English language education worldwide. It is beneficial for both teachers and students to understand the levels of English language proficiency (Jeon, 2022; North, 2014; Yalatay and Gurocak, 2016) and the knowledge and skills they require to communicate effectively (Phoolaikao and Sukying, 2021). As a result, the CEFR has become the requirement in teaching and learning the English language and has been implemented in the educational systems around the world, including Thailand.

Perceptions

In language learning, learners' perception of the target language ability is one of the important factors affecting their success in language learning. Perception refers to an idea, a belief, or an opinion that people have as a result of how they see or understand something (Pickens, 2005). Perception is considered one of the most crucial beliefs that influences one's own ability to successfully perform a task (Aksyah et al., 2021). Previous studies showed that there is a high positive correlation between students' perception and their motivation and success in language learning (Ghazali, 2016; Jiménez, 2018; Lai and Aksornjarung, 2018). Students with positive perceptions of English language learning are likely to increase their motivation, improve their language proficiency, and accomplish their goals in language learning (Nayos and Chuaychoowong, 2017).

There are several factors influencing variations in levels of English language proficiency including: (1) different perceptions on the part of test-takers as to the performance characteristics required to achieve specific scores (He and Shi, 2008) and (2) a mismatch between their expectations and the actual test itself (Xie and Andrews, 2013). These two factors require serious examination. The implementation of the CEFR has led many teachers to incorporate the CEFR framework

in EFL classrooms, where too much emphasis is placed on testing and assessment (Foley, 2019b). The investigation of students' and teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the CEFR has been suggested (Nii and Yunus, 2022). Therefore, it is interesting to examine Thai university students' perceptions of the CEFR as one of the key factors for success in English language learning.

Several studies on perceptions of CEFR have been conducted in EFL contexts. For example, Sulu and Kir (2014) investigated the teachers' perceptions of the CEFR and found that teachers rarely used the CEFR in their English teaching. Other studies (e.g., Díez-Bedmar and Byram, 2019; Musoeva, 2019) examined teachers' perceptions regarding the usefulness and impact of the CEFR in teaching English. The findings showed that the teachers had positive perceptions of implementing the CEFR. Teachers' perceptions had positive reactions on the implementation of the CEFR in EFL contexts since it is believed to be able to benefit the students in their future prospects (Nawai and Said, 2020; Uri and Aziz, 2018). However, teachers also reported the issue of a lack of knowledge about the CEFR making it hard to implement the CEFR in an orderly manner. This finding was in line with several studies (e.g., Alih, Yusoff, and Abdul, 2020; Tosun and Glover, 2020) indicating that teachers had insufficient training and support to implement the CEFR in EFL classrooms. As a result, the needs to receive proper training with sufficient preparation in cooperation with suitable and relevant teaching materials provided were necessary for the nationwide integration and implementation of CEFR.

In Thai contexts, there are several studies focusing on teachers' perceptions of the CEFR. For example, Kaewwichian and Jaturapitakkul (2018) investigated the self-perception of English proficiency of Thai teachers teaching EFL at the secondary level based on the CEFR. The findings revealed that the teachers had positive self-perceptions towards their English proficiency. Similarly, Charttrakul and Damnet (2021) investigated English teachers' perceptions at Rajabhat universities in Bangkok and suburban areas and found that the teachers mostly agreed with the implementation of the CEFR policy and perceived both

advantages and disadvantages of the CEFR. Another study by Phoolaikao and Sukying (2021) investigated pre-service English teachers' perceptions of the CEFR and found that the teachers had positive perceptions regarding the implementation of the CEFR into classroom practice; however, they also reported that they had limited knowledge and understanding of the CEFR. Namfah (2022) examined the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding CEFR-based English proficiency tests. The findings showed that their familiarity and awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test were at moderate and high levels, respectively. They also reported their negative perceptions because of inadequate information about the test that they had had to take in their final year of teacher education. From a review of the literature, it was found that the majority of studies focused on the teachers' perspectives, and there is a lack of studies on students' perspectives. As a result, the investigation of students' perceptions as one key stakeholder in implementing the CEFR in EFL education is necessary.

In line with the international trend, Thailand has used the CEFR as one of the frameworks for restructuring English curricula and teaching and constructing English tests at all levels of education, particularly in higher education (Foley, 2019a). Despite its popularity, it is seen that CEFR-based English language learning has not yet been successfully implemented in Thailand. The CEFR policy of the Thai Ministry of Education has challenged its effectiveness in implementation for universities throughout the country (Charttrakul and Damnet, 2021). To reveal factors affecting the success of CEFR implementation, investigating students' perceptions of the CEFR at the university level is needed. This study would provide a better understanding of students' perceptions of the CEFR to help increase their awareness of the English language learning process based on the CEFR.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed the mixed-methods research design to examine students' perceptions of the CEFR. The research involved quantitative

and qualitative methods of data collection. A questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data, and a semi-structured interview was carried out to collect qualitative data. The data from the two sources were analyzed and used to triangulate with each other. Data from the questionnaire can provide evidence of patterns among large populations, while data from the interview can provide more in-depth insights on participants' perceptions and actions (Kendall, 2008; Creamer, 2018).

Participants

The study was conducted at a large-size university in the northeast of Thailand. The participants of this study were Thai EFL undergraduate students. All the participants were studying a number of General and Academic English courses. The national education policy required the graduates to be at B1 level or higher upon graduation. 177 students voluntarily participated in the survey, and the convenience sampling method was employed. After that, 12 students representing each CEFR level from A1 to C2 levels were purposively selected for the interview. Two students were the representatives of each CEFR level. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the participants were 58.19 percent females and 41.81percent males, studying in the first year to the fourth year. A number of participants, accounting for 71.19 percent, had never had experience overseas, while 28.81percent of the participants had been abroad in western countries such as the USA ($n = 9$), New Zealand ($n = 7$), Australia ($n = 5$), and Norway ($n = 1$) and Asian countries such as South Korea ($n = 8$), Lao PDR ($n = 6$), Japan ($n = 5$), Singapore ($n = 3$), China ($n = 2$), Vietnam ($n = 2$), Cambodia ($n = 1$), Hong Kong ($n = 1$), and Malaysia ($n = 1$). It can be seen that just a few of the participants had exposure to English language environments while studying at university.

Research Instruments

In order to collect data, this study employed the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview as research instruments, which are described as follows.

Table 1 Demographic information of the participants

Category		Number of students	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	103	58.19
	Male	74	41.81
Year of study	1 st year	28	15.82
	2 nd year	40	22.60
	3 rd year	56	31.64
	4 th year	53	29.94
Experience abroad	Yes	51	28.81
	No	126	71.19

1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed to investigate Thai EFL university students' perceptions of the CEFR. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) participants' demographic information, (2) participants' self-perceptions of their English language proficiency levels based on the CEFR, and (3) their awareness of the CEFR implementation. The first section requires the participants to provide their personal information regarding their gender, year of study, and their experience abroad. The second section consists of 20 statements relating to the participants' perceptions of their English language proficiency based on the CEFR using descriptors of six reference levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. Each of six reference levels has its own descriptors concerning an individual's English language proficiency level. For example, "Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions" is the descriptor of A1 users. The participants were asked to rate the levels of their perceptions in the form of a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. All statements were constructed by adopting the can-do statements of the CEFR. The third section asks the participants about their knowledge and the sources of knowledge about the CEFR as well as their awareness of the CEFR. The questionnaire was in both Thai and English to accommodate

the participants and to avoid language barriers. The back translation method was used to validate the translation of the statements.

To ensure the validity, the questionnaire was checked by three experts with more than 10 years of English teaching experience at the university, using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) form. The IOC score showed that the questionnaire demonstrated a high level of item objective congruence (IOC = 0.90). The questionnaire was then piloted with 30 non-participant students with similar characteristics to the participants to ensure its reliability. The questionnaire had a reliability of 0.92 (Cronbach's Alpha coefficient), which indicated a high internal consistency level for the research instrument.

2. Semi-structured Interview

Another research instrument employed in this study was the semi-structured interview which aimed to gather qualitative data to examine the participants' in-depth perceptions of the CEFR. The participants were asked the interview questions in terms of (1) their perceptions of the CEFR and (2) their needs for skill development based on the CEFR. Before being implemented in the study, the interview questions were evaluated by three experts using the IOC form to ensure the validity. The interview questions were revised according to the experts' feedback and then tested with three non-participant students. The interviews were conducted in Thai to prevent any language barriers.

Data Collection

The data collection was started in November 2022. The study addressed ethical concerns. The participants provided their consent before participation. During the consent procedure, the participants were informed about the purposes of the study, data protection, and confidentiality. Their responses were confidential and were used for research purposes only. To collect the data, the questionnaire was administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire took about 30 minutes to complete; however, the participants were given two weeks to respond to the questionnaire. Then the semi-structured interview was conducted with 12 participants to gather more comprehensive results.

According to participants' codes (e.g., S-01), the researcher can trace who responded to the questionnaires. Therefore, they were randomly selected based on their CEFR levels. The interview was on a voluntary basis. Two participants from each level from A1 to C2 levels—were interviewed. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes. The Thai language was used for interviewing the participants to facilitate them and to avoid language barriers. The interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was analyzed using the software Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) 22.0 to provide descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages assessed the participants' demographic information and their knowledge about the CEFR. Means (M), and standard deviations (SD) assessed their awareness of the CEFR and perceptions of their English language proficiency based on the CEFR. The interpretation of the results was made according to the following ranges.

Scale	Mean score	Interpretation
5	4.51 – 5.00	Very high
4	3.51 – 4.50	High
3	2.51 – 3.50	Moderate
2	1.51 – 2.50	Low
1	1.00 – 1.50	Very low

For the analysis of the semi-structured interview, content analysis was employed to analyze the data. The data were translated from Thai into English and then coded into recurring themes. Data analyzed was checked with three inter-raters to ensure the trustworthiness of the coding.

Results

To answer the research question, the participants' perceptions of their English language proficiency levels based on the CEFR, their knowledge and awareness about the CEFR, and their needs in developing English language proficiency based on the CEFR were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The data from the questionnaire and the interview were triangulated to comprehensively understand the students' perceptions of the CEFR. The results of the study are presented as follows.

Self-perceived English Proficiency Levels Based on the CEFR

The participants' overall perceived English language proficiency is demonstrated in Table 2 based on the CEFR. The results indicated that the majority of participants perceived that their English language proficiency was at A1 level (M = 4.27, SD = .79), followed by A2 level (M = 4.18, SD = .84), B1 level (M = 3.88, SD = .91), C2 level (M = 3.39, SD = .84), B2 level (M = 3.21, SD = .90), and C1 level (M = 3.19, SD = .84), respectively. By looking at the highest mean scores, most of the participants strongly agreed that they can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help (Statement 20, M = 4.42, SD = .73). The second-highest rank showed that the participants perceived that they can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters (Statement 16, M = 4.30, SD = .84). The third-highest rank indicated that the participants believed that they can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type (Statement 18, M = 4.26, SD = .83). Overall, it can be interpreted that Thai EFL university students perceived that they had a low English proficiency level based on the CEFR which represented a basic user of the English language.

Table 2 Participants' perceived levels of English language proficiency based on the CEFR

No.	Statements	M	SD
1	I can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.	3.61	.78
2	I can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.	3.51	.80
3	I can express myself spontaneously, very fluently, and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.	3.06	.93
	C2 level	3.39	.84
4	I can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning.	3.42	.78
5	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.	3.22	.92
6	I can use English language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes.	3.09	.86
7	I can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.	3.04	.81
	C1 level	3.19	.84
8	I can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in the field of specialization.	3.26	.90
9	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.	3.23	.92
10	I can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	3.14	.88
	B2 level	3.21	.90
11	I can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.	3.79	.89

Table 2 Participants' perceived levels of English language proficiency based on the CEFR (cont.)

No.	Statements	M	SD
12	I can deal with language use in most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where English language is spoken.	3.83	.95
13	I can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.	3.92	.86
14	I can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.	3.96	.92
	B1 level	3.88	.91
15	I can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment).	4.08	.80
16	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.	4.30	.84
17	I can describe in simple terms aspects of my background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need.	4.17	.87
	A2 level	4.18	.84
18	I can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.	4.26	.83
19	I can introduce myself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows, and things he/she has.	4.12	.81
20	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.	4.42	.73
	A1 level	4.27	.79

Awareness of the CEFR Implementation

When asking the question “Do you know the CEFR?”, more than half of the participants (68.8%) did not know the CEFR, while only 31.2 percent knew the CEFR. Specifically, only 15 percent of the participants knew the main objectives of the CEFR. The sources of CEFR knowledge were from teachers (41.2%), websites (32.4%), curriculum (14.7%), high schools (8.7%), friends (1.5%), and the Work and Holiday Australia

(WAH) program (1.5%). Apart from their knowledge about the CEFR and sources of knowledge, their awareness about the CEFR was also examined as shown in Table 3.

From Table 3, the results showed that overall the participants' perceived awareness about the CEFR was at a moderate level ($M = 2.86$; $SD = .58$). First, the participants highly perceived the importance of the CEFR in teaching and learning English at the university ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .68$). In addition, the participants' perception was positive in using the CEFR as a guideline to examine their own English language abilities ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .62$). They perceived that the use of the CEFR in teaching and learning English is a good university policy ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .64$); however, they felt that they were less informed about using the CEFR as the guideline in teaching and learning English by the university ($M = 1.90$, $SD = .35$).

Table 3 Participants' awareness about the CEFR implementation

No.	Statements	M	SD
1	The CEFR is important in teaching and learning English at the university.	3.30	.68
2	One of the main purposes of the CEFR is to establish common English proficiency standards nationally and internationally.	3.08	.61
3	The CEFR can promote the self-development of English language skills.	3.05	.59
4	I can use the CEFR as a guideline to examine my own English language abilities.	3.18	.62
5	Teachers should integrate the CEFR as part of English language classroom teaching.	2.11	.50
6	The use of the CEFR in teaching and learning English is a good university policy.	3.15	.64
7	I have been formally informed about using the CEFR as the guideline in teaching and learning English by the university.	1.90	.35
	Average	2.86	.58

Apart from the data obtained from the questionnaire, the results from the interview are presented in terms of their perceptions of the CEFR and their needs for English language development based on the CEFR.

1. Perceptions of CEFR

The results from the interview showed that students had both positive and negative perceptions of the CEFR. It was found that many students disclosed their positive perceptions of the CEFR. They perceived the importance of the CEFR in English language learning and assessment. They agreed that the CEFR could be used as a guideline for students. It is noted that students who reported their positive perceptions were those who had the perceived CEFR levels at C1 or C2, which are the highest levels representing a proficient English user. Sample excerpts are provided as follows.

I think the CEFR gives importance to learner autonomy and self-assessment. It is good and easy to follow. I can use this scale to evaluate my language skills (Student C1/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

Based on my personal experience, I had an experience of the TOEIC test, but I never took the CEFR test. I think learning and having a test by using the CEFR is an interesting and challenging way to develop my English skills (Student C1/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I think the CEFR is beneficial. I will use descriptions in each level to assess my own English abilities and choose learning activities to improve my English skills (Student C2/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

It is a good guideline for students to understand and be able to apply the CEFR descriptions in English language learning (Student C2/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

Apart from their positive perceptions, students also reported their concerns in learning English based on CEFR. The results revealed that all students reported that they were worried about their English proficiency regarding the CEFR levels and lacked understanding of the CEFR. Some students reported the difficulties such as lack of confidence in expressing their thoughts and opinions in English. Sample excerpts are provided as follows.

It is very difficult for me to pass the CEFR test at the B1 or B2 levels. I don't have enough understanding of the CEFR. I also lacked confidence in expressing my opinions in English (Student A1/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I never knew before that we can use CEFR descriptions for learning and teaching English. This is even the first time I have heard about the CEFR (Student A1/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

In my opinion, I think the CEFR is too ideal for teaching and learning English to put into practice in Thailand because many students don't know what it is (Student B1/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I think the use of CEFR may not be practical for Thai students. I am afraid of speaking English and do not have confidence in communicating with foreigners in real situations (Student B2/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

In addition, the results showed that many students mentioned lack of time and insufficient resources as major barriers for learning English. Sample excerpts are provided as follows.

I do not have time to practice outside class to improve my English language skills (Student A2/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I think the university did not provide sufficient resources for practicing English for students (Student B1/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I do not have enough learning resources to help improve my English language skills. I think there are limited activities and language practice for me (Student C2/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

2. Needs for English skills development

In terms of their needs for English language development, the results showed that students in A1 and A2 levels needed to improve their listening and speaking skills most. While C1 and C2 students

rated reading and writing skills as the most desirable skills to improve, particularly academic writing. Sample excerpts are provided as follows:

I want to improve my speaking skill because it is the most useful skill in nowadays life and business. I haven't had a chance to practice listening and speaking, so I find it is quite difficult to catch up with native speakers because they speak very fast (Student A1/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I want to improve my speaking skills most because I personally have difficulties in speaking and cannot communicate well with English native speakers (Student A2/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

I think writing and reading skills are what I lack and want to study more. Because sometimes it is very complicated, and I am the type of person who gives up easily (Student C1/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

The biggest challenge for me is writing skills. Writing is the skill that I want to improve most because I am always stuck with no idea on how to write effectively in academic contexts (Student C2/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

Regarding the CEFR, some students mentioned that they need support from the university and should be formally informed by the teacher about the descriptions in the CEFR in the way that they will use it to assess their own English abilities. Sample excerpts are provided as follows.

I think the teacher should inform the students about the "can do" statements, so that I can use them to assess my own English abilities by myself (Student A2/1 [Pseudonym], 2023).

In my opinion, the university should support students in the use of the CEFR like some training because I think that it provides the international standard of English proficiency tests like TOEFL or IELTS (Student C1/2 [Pseudonym], 2023).

In summary, as most university course requirements around the world are now aligned with the CEFR standards, the findings would be beneficial for teachers to understand students' different CEFR levels, their perceptions, and their need of English language development based on the CEFR so that they could see more clearly what students have to work on and could employ appropriate instructional designs of English courses at the university level to promote their English language proficiency in all four language skills based on the CEFR.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results, the key ideas are summarized and discussed in relation to previous studies as follows.

First, the findings show that most students perceived that their English language proficiency based on the CEFR is at A1 level ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .79$). This can be interpreted that Thai university students could communicate well about something simple related to their routines and everyday life. This is similar to the results obtained from the CEFR-based tests by previous studies (Luksup and Chaisoda, 2019; Phong-a-ran, Luksup, and Chaisoda, 2019; Waluyo, 2019) indicating that Thai university students were identified as basic users of English or as A1 level based on the CEFR. At the A1 level, students can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. They can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know, and things they have. They can also interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. Therefore, this level is considered low since they could not reach the B1 and B2 levels, which represent independent users of English, as stated in the goals of the Thai Ministry of Education. This may indicate unsuccessful English learning and teaching at the university level in Thailand because the students' English proficiency does not reach the expected levels.

Additionally, based on the questionnaire, the findings show that students have little knowledge of the CEFR, and their awareness about the CEFR was quite limited ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .58$). They felt that they were less informed by the university about using the CEFR as the guideline in teaching and learning English. According to Farehah and Salehuddin (2018), limited knowledge and a low level of awareness about the CEFR can lead to misconceptions and unsuccessful implementation of the CEFR. This suggests that in order to successfully implement the CEFR at the university level, both the university and teachers should play more active roles and raise students' awareness by informing them about the CEFR and its alignment with the national curriculum. This was supported by a study of Liddicoat (2014) which indicated that the CEFR should be effectively implemented both at macro or policy level and at pedagogical or micro level.

Moreover, the findings from the interview indicate that the students' perceptions of the CEFR were varied. Some students considered it necessary, while others opposed the idea. The positive perception was mainly from the CEFR's potential to promote learner autonomy and self-assessment. It is noted that students who had positive perceptions were those who had the perceived levels of the CEFR at C1 or C2, which are the highest levels. The findings also reveal that there were still some students having negative perceptions such as lack of understanding of the CEFR. This finding aligns with a study of Waluyo (2019) which suggested that Thai university students need to have a better understanding of the CEFR in theory and practice. In addition, lack of time constrains the advantages of the CEFR for students. This finding is in line with Behnke et al. (2004) indicating that lack of time, particularly among EFL students, is one of the major barriers towards improving English language proficiency and resulted in the unsuccessful implementation of the CEFR in language classrooms (Yüce and Mirici, 2019). Another challenge relates to the issue of insufficient resources for teaching and learning based on the CEFR. As a result, it is suggested to encourage English language teachers to reflect on students' English language learning needs.

In terms of students' needs for their English skills development, students with lower proficiency levels (A1 and A2 on the CEFR) expressed a strong desire to improve their listening and speaking skills to engage in basic conversations and everyday interactions. In contrast, those at higher proficiency levels (C1 and C2) preferred to focus on enhancing their reading and writing skills, recognizing their importance of academic success and professional communication. This difference highlights the distinct needs and goals of learners at various stages of language development.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL university students in Thailand due to the convenience sampling method, which limits representativeness. Moreover, reliance on self-reported data from a questionnaire and interviews may introduce biases, as students' perceived proficiency might not reflect their actual proficiency.

This study suggests that educational institutions should provide targeted training and resources about the CEFR for both students and teachers, including workshops and the development of CEFR-related teaching materials. Also, incorporating the CEFR related goals into the curriculum will help students recognize the relevance of their learning. Additionally, language exchange programs can help lower-level students practice listening and speaking while providing higher-level students opportunities to improve their reading and writing skills.

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